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SQUIER SONIC SERIES

The Bullet is back – but is it better than before?



Back in April, Fender made guitar fans across the globe giddy with excitement with the announcement of the Squier Sonic range – a collection of Stratocasters, Telecasters, Mustangs and a handful of bass guitars that weighed in under £200. As a successor to the cult popular Bullet range, though, the Sonics had a lot to live up to.

Squier Bullet guitars were widely regarded as some of the best affordable guitars money

could buy, and represented both a solid choice for first-time guitarists, and a well-priced platform for more seasoned strummers to either obtain some Fender feel or put their modding abilities to the test without worrying about expensive overheads.

So, like we say, a lot to live up to, because while the Bullets were irresistibly cheap, their individual performances vastly outweighed their humble price tags. Mike Rutherford of Genesis, for example, took the Bullet Strat on an arena tour not too long ago.

Fender has sought to continue the Bullet's legacy with a new generation of electrics, which comprises all the classic Squier shapes you'd expect, as well as some new faces in the form of the Esquire, and a sole humbucker-equipped Stratocaster.

Here, we put four Squier Sonic models through their paces to find out whether Fender's most affordable entry-level guitar family is actually any good, or whether the whole thing is just a load of snake oil. Spoiler alert: it's the former.



SQUIER SONIC STRATOCASTER HT

£155

The Squier Sonic Stratocaster's predecessor made quite the name for itself back in 2021 when Mike Rutherford revealed he'd been lugging a Squier Bullet Strat around for Genesis' tour. Is its successor arena-worthy? Well, with a bit of a setup, we genuinely see no reason why not.

It's snappy, vibrant and resonant, and the Torino Red poplar body (used over the standard alder) gives it a lighter, airier vibe that really suits unplugged playing. The maple neck is a comfortable C-profile that feels familiarly playable. The guitar also held its own when plugged into a Fender Blues Junior. The neck pickup was warm and hefty, and excelled with Hendrixian and SRV styles when fed through a Tube Screamer-style drive. Positions three and four gave nice amounts of responsive clean quack à la Cory Wong, and though the bridge pickup was a tad fizzy, it would be very harsh to be over-critical of the budget guitar when it has otherwise passed all tests with flying colours.

Of course, the Sonic is realistically an entry-point range, so talk of arenas and world tours may be premature – but, if anything, that just makes this whole discussion easier. For first-time players or those looking to add a Strat to their arsenal without breaking the bank, it really doesn't come much better than this. There is a tremolo-equipped version for those wanting a more traditional Strat experience, but this hardtail iteration seems to be an ideal, no-nonsense, low-maintenance workhorse that emerged from our rigorous playing test unscathed.

As you'd expect with a £155 guitar, it isn't perfect – the volume and tone pots were just a little too stiff for our liking, and the pickups could be better – but it comes very close to being a flawless sub-£200 instrument. If Rutherford ever needs to retire the Bullet, we know exactly which Squier he should be reaching for next.



SQUIER SONIC STRATOCASTER HT H

£155

Fender recently revived Tom DeLonge's cult classic signature guitar, but many aspiring strummers and Blink-182 fans keen to get their hands on it were unfortunately priced out of a move thanks to the fact the limited-edition single-humbucker Strat weighed in at a hefty £1,299. Well, for just over a tenth of that price, Squier has presented a seriously impressive alternative in the form of the Sonic Stratocaster HT H.

Since it's been gutted of two thirds of its electronics, the guitar is very light, and is made lighter by virtue of the body of the guitar seeming to be that of a standard Strat – in other words, it's got room under the hood for some more pickups. Not only does that contribute to its weight, it also makes it far more resonant, with an impressive unplugged projection. Pair that with the silky smooth C-shape neck and you're in for a blast.

As you could probably tell, there isn't much to this model, but that doesn't stop it being a genuinely fun instrument to play. Like the Strat HT, the workmanship is impressive, and the guitar copes will when put through its paces at the top end of the fretboard. Given the guitar's simplistic construction, though, there's a lot riding on that sole ceramic humbucker to deliver tones that can sell the whole package. And while it's not quite DeLonge's Seymour Duncan Invader, it's a respectable unit at this price point. Warm and hearty when clean, and delivering some singing high-gains when paired with a number of our Line 6 effects.

It's worth noting that low-budget Squier models are widely regarded as top-notch modding platforms, or guinea pig guitars to test some DIY luthiering, and the HT H is no exception. Indeed, if we were to pick one of these beauts up, our first move would be to swap out that humbucker for a more premium pickup. Otherwise, we wouldn't change a thing.



SQUIER SONIC TELECASTER

£159

No Squier range is complete without a Telecaster, and here the quota has been filled by the poplar-bodied Sonic iteration of Fender's single-cut. Though available in an assortment of finishes and a choice of fretboard materials, our example takes on a decidedly '50s flavor thanks to its no-nonsense Black finish and maple fingerboard.

It's a similar story to the Sonic Strat – an authentic Tele experience with some adjustments to wrestle that price down to the sub-£200 mark. Weighing in with Fender's standard 25.5" scale length, with 9.5" radius, and a 21-fret maple fingerboard, the lighter-than-usual guitar is just as delightful to navigate as the Strat, with the C-shape satin urethane maple neck lending itself to some especially slick fretting transitions.

While the pickups may be a tad on the glassy side for some, this particular, er, sonic characteristic is arguably better implemented here than in the Strat HT's circuit – and the prominent highs lend themselves to some authentic Tele snaps. And, of course, the highs of both ceramic single coils can be tamed through the responsive tone knob, which works alongside a master volume parameter and a three-way toggle switch. While the neck coil excelled in our Jason Isbell-inspired country experiments, the bridge pickup performed admirably when asked to deal out some more high-gain riffs.

A more modern six-saddle bridge sees the guitar further depart from its '50s vibe, but this appointment will merely make the whole package easier to maintain, set up and play – especially for beginners – than if it were to pack a three-saddle alternative.

There's a common thread emerging from this string of mini-reviews, and it's that the Sonic series might be a serious upgrade from the Bullets, and that these might just be the best value-for-money Fender guitars you'll ever get your hands on.



SQUIER SONIC MUSTANG HH

£149

We raved about the original Squier Bullet Mustang when it was doing the rounds a few years ago, and now the short-scale six-string is back in Sonic form. But is it good enough to rival what some people were calling the king of beginner offsets? Well, if our ultra-cool Flash Pink, maple fretboard-equipped, dual humbucker-loaded example is anything to go by, the signs are very promising indeed.

With a 24" scale length and compact offset body, for us, this was the most fun Sonic to play during our in-depth test run (conveniently, it's also the most affordable!) with the shorter dimensions, C-shape satin urethane maple neck and 9.5" radius maple fingerboard resulting in a genuinely joyous playing experience. The poplar body, drafted in over the Bullet's basswood, is, again, supremely light and comfortable, both sitting and standing, and adds a nice resonant snap to complement the shorter scale.

This one features a pair of ceramic Squier humbuckers, though there is a double single-coil option available for those who prefer more of a traditional indie rock vibe. These humbuckers are more than capable of channeling indie rock, but it's when a bit of dirt is introduced to the signal chain for something a little more grungier and heavier that this guitar comes to life. And when dialed back to clean the neck pickup offers up some pleasing warm depth.

Perhaps because of its shorter scale length, the build quality and setup isn't quite up to the standards of the 25.5" models above, and the Mustang didn't fare quite as well in the bending and fretting tests, with some upper frets choking out when soloing. However, that's potentially just a pro setup away from being rectified, and the presence of a more sturdy block saddle bridge certainly feels like an upgrade in the hardware department.



SQUIER SONIC STRATOCASTER HT

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★



SQUIER SONIC STRATOCASTER HT H

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★

FINAL VERDICT

Which Sonic will you choose?

All in all, the Squier Sonic range looks to be a seriously impressive collection of guitars, which will provide beginners and accomplished players alike with the opportunity to try out Fender-style instruments at an accessible price point. Build quality, playability and tones across the board were just about bang on the money, and with a little TLC – and perhaps some experimental DIY modding – these builds would easily hold their own against more expensive instruments.

AT A GLANCE

STRAT HT

BODY: Poplar
NECK: Maple
NECK PROFILE: "C" shape
FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5"
FRETS: Narrow Tall
PICKUPS: 3 x Ceramic Single-Coil
CONTROLS: Master Volume, Tone 1 (Neck/Middle), Tone 2 (Bridge), Five-Way Blade Switch
FINISH: Torino Red



TELE

BODY: Poplar
NECK: Maple
NECK PROFILE: "C" shape
FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5"
FRETS: Narrow Tall
Pickups: 2 x Ceramic Single-Coil
CONTROLS: Master Volume, Master Tone, Three-Position Blade Switch
FINISH: Black



STRAT HT H

BODY: Poplar
NECK: Maple
NECK PROFILE: "C" shape
FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5"
FRETS: Narrow Tall
PICKUPS: Ceramic Humbucker
CONTROLS: Master Volume, Master Tone
FINISH: Flash Pink



MUSTANG HH

BODY: Poplar
NECK: Maple
NECK PROFILE: "C" shape
FINGERBOARD RADIUS: 9.5"
FRETS: Narrow Tall
PICKUPS: 2 x Ceramic Humbucker
CONTROLS: Master Volume, Master Tone, Three-Position Toggle
FINISH: Flash Pink



SQUIER SONIC TELECASTER

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★



SQUIER SONIC STRATOCASTER MUSTANG HH

SUMMARY	FEATURES	★	★	★	★	★
	SOUND QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	VALUE FOR MONEY	★	★	★	★	★
	BUILD QUALITY	★	★	★	★	★
	USABILITY	★	★	★	★	★
	OVERALL RATING	★	★	★	★	★